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Debriefing as an Instrument to Promote Student/Faculty Partnerships

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Eastern Kentucky University

Student/faculty partnerships are essential to academic success. Key components of the partnership include mutual trust, respect, and open communication. Faculty can integrate debriefing and therapeutic communication techniques in student conversations to foster a collaborative learning environment.

Introduction

Student-faculty partnerships are the foundation of academic success and are based on mutual trust, respect, and open communication. These relationships extend beyond the classroom. Frequently, students seek out faculty guidance to discuss the challenges they face related to learning experiences. Faculty benefit from obtaining as much information about a student's unique experience to formulate a collaborative, individualized plan for successful learning. The intentional selection of communication techniques that foster trust, demonstrate caring behaviors, and reflect a genuine interest in the student's experience, will encourage open sharing of information and create the foundation for a successful learning partnership. As Judge Teresa Ravandi said the following:

The ability to communicate is one of the most basic needs: allowing a student an effective means to express herself supports human dignity. Every minute of every school day, communication is the key to social, emotional, functional, and academic progress (Sullivan, 2016).

Therapeutic communication and debriefing techniques provide a framework for collaborative discussions that can lead to academic success.

Context of Program

Therapeutic communication and debriefing are important concepts in Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) School of Nursing. Therapeutic communication is an

essential component of nursing care and caring behaviors, which is a fundamental curricular concept in the Baccalaureate of Nursing Program. Students learn therapeutic communication concepts in didactic courses and apply the concepts in the clinical settings while providing patient care. Clinical faculty evaluate the application of the concepts in the clinical setting across the curriculum.

Debriefing is a reflective learning technique that is applied after student participation in a simulation. Simulations are infused across the curriculum and faculty facilitated debriefing is the primary learning technique used to develop critical thinking and clinical judgment. The International Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning published standards for simulations, which include “All simulation-based experiences include a planned debriefing session aimed at improving future performance” (INACSL, 2020).

Overview of Concepts

Therapeutic Communication

In health care, therapeutic communication is defined as a dynamic and interactive process between a clinician and client consisting of words and actions with the purpose of achieving identified health-related goals (Arnold & Boggs, 2016). Arnold and Boggs (2016) state therapeutic communication allows the client the opportunity to “share information, to be heard, and to be validated” (p. 25). In healthcare, the foundation of therapeutic communication includes trust between the provider and client. Trust is developed by expressing genuine interest and establishing a non-judgmental attitude that supports respect between individuals. Developing a shared partnership and actively listening are essential components to consider when implementing therapeutic conversations.

Educational partnerships begin with faculty building rapport with individual students. This rapport begins during the first encounter and continues through the length of the relationship (Arnold & Boggs, 2016). When leading a therapeutic conversation, the facilitator must be aware of both verbal and non-verbal cues from an individual. Over half of communication occurs with nonverbal cues (Arnold & Boggs, 2016). Nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, posture, positioning of individuals, and eye contact will either encourage or impede an individual’s ability to build rapport.

Arnold & Boggs (2016) define active listening as “an intentional form of listening” (p. 77). This style of listening encourages the use of several responses from the

facilitator that demonstrate engagement in the conversation including seeking clarification, restating, paraphrasing, reflection, and summarization. An example of each response is listed below with its specific purpose within the conversation (Arnold & Boggs, 2016):

| Response | Used for | Example Stem |
|---------------|----------------------------|---|
| Clarification | Request for clarification | Will you give me an example...? |
| Restating | Broaden perspective | Are you saying that...? |
| Paraphrasing | Accuracy of information | It sounds as though you are saying... |
| Reflection | Simple observations | You sounded frustrated when you stated... |
| Summarization | Review content and process | Before moving forward... |

Debriefing

Debriefing is an essential component to simulation and allows students to evaluate their performance and understand their actions to develop safer practice (Rudolph et al., 2007). The International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (2020) developed standards for best practice with debriefing. Components of debriefing standard focus on “trust, open communication, self-analysis and reflection” (INACSL Standards of Best Practice: SimulationSM, 2016, p. 28). Each act of debriefing should include components of “clinical judgement, reasoning, and reflection” (INACSL Standards of Best Practice: SimulationSM, 2016, p.28). Facilitators are essential to the debriefing process in simulation, as they support open communication, create a non-judgmental environment, and focus on processes rather than blame (Lyons et al., 2015).

EKU School of Nursing Simulation Center utilizes the Debriefing with Good Judgement (Rudolph et al., 2007) method for all debriefing encounters with students. This debriefing process includes a decompression phase, analysis phase, and summary phase. The decompression phase allows simulation participants to state concerns about the simulation and is a time to review the objectives of the simulation. During the analysis phase (Rudolph et al., 2007) open ended questions are asked. This encourages student engagement and allows students to begin to evaluate their performance. Questioning during the analysis phase utilizes the advocacy/inquiry method and questions should be stated in a non-judgmental way. Examples of statements that can be used include the following: “I observed...”, “I am concerned...”, “I am curious about...”, or “What was happening when...”. The summary phase completes the debriefing process and includes the take home points for simulation participants.

Analysis

While therapeutic communication and best practices of debriefing are integrated into every nursing students’ simulation experience, these concepts are also included in faculty-student meetings. These meetings are one-on-one in the faculty member’s office, or they may occur on a larger scale, in the classroom. Faculty can apply the techniques used by the facilitator in simulation debriefing during these conversations.

When simulation was first introduced at ECU School of Nursing, debriefings were analyzed for effectiveness. Best practices with debriefing were evaluated and prioritized with all simulation experiences. Faculty quickly realized the importance of incorporating therapeutic communication into each debriefing session. The principles of active listening (Arnold & Boggs, 2016) were integrated into each simulation debriefing discussion. Faculty also recognized that the principles of debriefing and therapeutic communication should be included with faculty-student meetings in order to build trust and rapport with students.

Therapeutic communication and debriefing concepts should be included with faculty-student meetings that occur one-on-one. Most of these meetings take place in the faculty member’s office on campus; therefore, the office should be an inviting and safe place for students to enter. Utilizing nonverbal behaviors such as ensuring the office door is open, when feasible, can ease a student’s anxiety when approaching faculty. Faculty can encourage open communication by making sure they are not positioned behind their desk while talking with the student, which has the potential to convey a barrier between the faculty and student. Additional

nonverbal behaviors that encourage partnership between faculty and students include open posture and maintaining eye contact.

To ease a student into a conversation, start with a positive statement and begin with simple questions, such as “Good to see you today! What brings you to my office?” or “Nice of you to stop by! Do you have any concerns about...?” This approach parallels the decompression phase of debriefing and encourages the student to share concerns. As the student provides responses to open-ended questions, faculty should actively listen to demonstrate engagement, respect, and a caring attitude. More complex open-ended questions can be asked of the student while the conversation continues. The student’s communication patterns provide the faculty with unique types of information that can lead to further questions. For example, if the student leaves out relevant details, faculty can use open-ended questions to seek more information. Additionally, if the student uses absolute terms, such as “always”, faculty can clarify and redirect using a question such as, “Always is a strong term, can you tell me about a time when there was an exception?” These types of open-ended questions provide clarity for both the student and faculty which builds mutual trust and respect.

Integrating the principles of active listening (Arnold & Boggs, 2016) are crucial for one-on-one meetings with students in order to promote mutual respect. For example, faculty may incorporate the principle of clarification (Arnold & Boggs, 2016), by including a comment such as “I hear what you are saying. Can you please clarify so that I am able to understand your point of view?” which may help establish trust and validate a student’s feelings.

Faculty can combine active listening and debriefing to encourage a student’s self-reflection and analysis. Questions should focus on processes, rather than blame, to encourage the student to reflect on academic behaviors. For example, faculty may ask “I am interested in hearing about how you prepared for this assignment. Will you tell me about how and when you worked on this paper?” This style of inquiry is similar to the analysis phase of debriefing and promotes student reflection as mentioned by Rudolph et al. (2007). The student may describe a work session that lasted several hours and went late into the night, just before an assignment was due. Faculty could respond with, “How was your energy level and focus while you worked on this paper late into the night?” This will encourage further reflection of work habits and hopefully lead to a change in behaviors. During analysis, students are encouraged to evaluate their own performance, and can be asked to identify their strengths and challenges in order to assist with improving their academic performance.

Faculty may meet with students who are challenged by the curriculum in a course. While these meetings may be quite difficult, by including concepts of debriefing and therapeutic communication, faculty have the opportunity to encourage and empower a student. For example, including debriefing concepts, such as self-analysis and reflection (INACSL Standards of Best Practice: SimulationSM, 2016), may help a student evaluate their performance in a course. Using statements such as “Tell me about how you prepared for this exam.” or “Describe your feelings as you take an exam.” encourage students to reflect and share their experiences. The student may need to change study habits or focus on methods to address test anxiety, but faculty will not know how to best coach a student without obtaining more information. Information-seeking statements encourage student reflection and assist faculty in identifying individualized steps to guide the student towards success in their academic courses.

At the end of a meeting with a student, faculty should summarize the discussion, as practiced in debriefing. Faculty should review what was identified as contributing factors to the academic challenges and the steps the student should take for academic success. As in the previous example, the student may need to work on a paper a few hours at a time, over a few days, and plan to finish a paper early to allow adequate time for revisions. Another example may involve changing study habits. A student may reflect and realize that the study group they meet with is more of a social group than a work group. Therefore, the student may need to adjust their study plans accordingly.

Therapeutic communication and debriefing concepts may also be incorporated in the classroom setting. While conversations with a group of students may be more challenging than with individuals, faculty members have the opportunity to ease potential tension that may arise from a student group needing to express stress or frustration. Recognizing verbal and nonverbal cues, and adjusting conversations based on those cues, enables faculty to develop a rapport with a student group based on trust.

Faculty should begin the discussion being cognizant of their non-verbal behaviors, such as maintaining a non-threatening posture and sitting at eye level. Additionally, taking notes is another technique to show that faculty are receptive to student concerns. It is essential that faculty exhibit a calm and confident demeanor, while avoiding a defensive attitude. Faculty can ease tension by utilizing the concepts of active listening, such as reflection (Arnold & Boggs, 2016), by stating to the class, “I hear what you are saying and sense the frustration that you are experiencing. While I cannot fix the issue at the moment, I will process

what you are saying and discuss this with ...” Demonstrating active listening and empathizing with the students’ perspective promotes a collaborative environment. In order to maintain trust, the faculty needs to follow-up on the issues discussed.

Discussion/Implications

EKU School of Nursing faculty who have incorporated debriefing and therapeutic communication techniques when meeting with students have received positive informal feedback. Specific examples of student feedback include: “Thank you for believing in me.”, “Your one-on-one sessions meant the world to me.”, and “Your guidance has carried me a long way.” These statements reflect trust, mutual respect, and supportive, open communication that promote a collaborative effort. Due to the positive student feedback, faculty are encouraged to continue to use these techniques.

Faculty are in a position to build a partnership with students both in and out of the classroom. The foundation of this partnership is open communication, which promotes trust and respect. Therapeutic communication and debriefing techniques provide a framework for development of a collaborative faculty/student relationship. Faculty/student partnerships are alliances that lead to learning and academic success.

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